



## Grundtvig, Europe and The Third World: Dilemmas and Challenges

Hansen, Holger Bernt

*Published in:*  
Grundtvig-Studier

*Publication date:*  
1993

*Document version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Hansen, H. B. (1993). Grundtvig, Europe and The Third World: Dilemmas and Challenges. *Grundtvig-Studier*, 44(1), 22. <http://ojs.statsbiblioteket.dk/index.php/grs/article/view/16104>

# **Grundtvig, Europe and The Third World:**

## **Dilemmas and Challenges**

*By Holger Bernt Hansen*

The 1990s have been a period of rapid change on a global scale. Our concept of the world is changing to an extent that we feel ourselves somewhat confused. It is questioned whether our historical experiences can help us any more to understand the present and come to grips with the future. It is also questioned whether history conceived as a dialogue with the past still provides us with some new visions. In other words the historical dimension is endangered.

In addition, our conceptual framework is under discussion. Concepts like nation and people, ethnic groups and minorities, nationalism and universalism are disputed, and their explanatory value seems to have been reduced.

Furthermore, the viability of institutions like state and church and offices within them are increasingly being questioned, not least the authority associated with them.

Starting from such a pessimistic position we may say that we are moving into a kind of vacuum, especially when we focus on developments in the Third World and the relationship between Europe and the Third World. Not least in the latter respect there exists a situation of uncertainty where we invoke the customary old values and try to let them work although they appear rather shallow and not particularly helpful as explanatory tools.

This may sound like a kind of culture pessimism which is not unknown in European history, not least in connection with discussions of Europe's attitude to the non-European world, now called the Third World. Only within the last two centuries have there been movements on a scale which runs from great optimism to deep pessimism reflecting changes in Europe's self-perception and its understanding of its own role in relation to

the Third World. Right now we find ourselves in the middle of the scale, caught in a strange mixture of optimism and pessimism. Europe's self-confidence vis-à-vis Third World countries has not been greater since the last decades of the 19th century, as I will argue later. At the same time Europe right now also finds itself in a very uncertain state where long shadows from the past create insecurity about the direction for the future - not least the Yugoslavian crisis has revealed this whole uncertainty as to the future course.

When we look at the key issues: the devaluation of historical experience, the uncertainty connected with concepts like nation and people, the weakening of institutions like state and church, and the insufficiency of the customary value system, it is striking that all these are central themes in Grundtvig's thinking and writings or at least part of the heritage from Grundtvig. And if pessimism is our point of departure we may naturally ask whether Grundtvig too has gone with the wind of change, so that in the supposedly emerging new world order his categories, his interpretation of history, his suggestions and ideas are no longer relevant and workable.

But if our point of departure is the more optimistic one that like all great thinkers there is a universalism connected with Grundtvig which means that he cannot be dismissed just by the waves of history it will be relevant to look for some answers from Grundtvig in the present situation of turmoil, not for any final solution, but for some guidance in understanding the historical phase we are passing through.

This was tried at an early stage when in the 1950s Denmark for the first time had to define its relationship with the developing world or, as it was called in those days, the underdeveloped countries. At that time it was suggested by a number of people to link Grundtvig and the Third World. First of all, Grundtvig's ideas and their importance for the development in Denmark over the last century, not least adult education and more specifically the Folk High School movement, have presented answers and solutions which were considered very appropriate to the challenges facing Third World countries. And it is significant that this was not just an attitude held by groups of people connected with the Folk High Schools or by grass root

movements or committed pressure groups, but also by decision makers, be they politicians or bureaucrats who provided state support for the various initiatives. It was not just the general idea of adult education and the importance of vocational training that generated the support. It was a belief in the Folk High School idea itself - that it is a valuable instrument in a process of change and that it can become a mobilizing force in the face of the Third World's doubt and uncertainty as to the future pattern of development. Furthermore, it illustrates how deeply ingrained the Folk High School idea and the heritage from Grundtvig have become in the Danish value system.

At the same time there have been people in the Third World who at an early stage were responsive to the idea that Grundtvig has a message of relevance for their particular situation. *Dr. Kachi Ozumba* to whom I will turn later, is one outstanding example. My own first experience with a Third World representative who had taken a great interest in Grundtvig presents another example which at the same time illustrates some of the dilemmas and paradoxes in employing Grundtvig outside his proper context.

In the late 1950s, just at the time when colonialism was about to be replaced by independence, and a new line of connection between Europe and the extra-European world was established by way of development assistance, I lived at the time as a student in a hall of residence in Copenhagen. One day a man from South Korea came to live on the same floor as I did together with 20 Danish students. He had come to Denmark with the single purpose of studying Grundtvig, and every Sunday he went on his pilgrimage to what was clearly in his mind a holy place, Vartov. But more than that, he frequently went to Vartov on Saturday afternoons to be present at the wedding ceremonies held there, and he came back in the evening with shining eyes as if he had seen the light - an experience that had obviously had a profound effect on him.

But one Saturday evening he returned to our floor in the middle of a major party. He was without any doubt unhappy about the contrast between what he had just experienced in Vartov and the party now going on. He became even more unhappy when he discovered that the door leading to his front

room (though not the door to his own room) had been unhinged and was now used as a table. In fact, he was filled with anger, if not outright rage, and in that mood he shouted to the crowd which by then had become quite lively: »Grundtvig has forbidden you to remove doors!«

I don't know whether we had an example here of Grundtvig's own theology that »the Word creates what it says«. But as it happens, the Korean visitor silenced the unruly crowd, and his door was immediately put back on its hinges, and he could retire to what may not have been a peaceful night. Clearly we were faced with a man who was convinced that Grundtvig was of importance and had a message for his own - at that time - Third World country; he was even prepared to imbue Grundtvig with the ultimate authority in most areas of life. We do not know to what extent he eventually succeeded in importing Grundtvig to his part of the world in the very fundamentalistic way he approached Grundtvig. But probably only with limited success, for it goes both for Danes and for people from the Third World that carbon copies of the Grundtvigian ideas and the Folk High School idea will never work. In one of his papers Dr. Ozumba has expressed it very clearly when he says that »while remaining faithful to the ideals, it is our right to see, feel and live them as Nigerians«.

It is within that context that I will try to use Grundtvig and his concept of history as a guide in approaching the Third World and its position and options within the new world order - or disorder. From the outset it should be made clear that it will be a long day's journey towards Grundtvig and the Third World, and at the end we will not have arrived at a new world order in accordance with Grundtvig's ideas - a lot of doors will still remain unhinged!

The areas now classified as Third World countries have for centuries been defined by their relationship with Europe which again means that it has not been a balanced relationship. On the contrary, there has been a lack of equality, and the Third World countries have mainly been at the receiving end. It follows that the Third World to a large extent has been the victim of Europe's own self-understanding and of Europe's interpretation of its relationship with the non-European world.

One special feature has been that the religious or rather the Christian dimension constitutes an essential part of the European self-consciousness when defining its relationship with other parts of the world, significantly expressed by the 19th century English historian Bellah, »Europe is Christianity, Christianity is Europe«. This was apparent in the recent confrontation with the Arab-Islamic world during the crisis in the Persian Gulf, and it was a leading motive in 19th century colonialism. The extension of the western-Christian civilization to other parts of the world served as the ideology behind colonialism, and it was in that connection that Christian missions served a useful purpose in the colonial enterprise. The symbiosis may have worked differently in various areas in accordance with varying political conditions. But the Christian missions had timing and room in common with the colonial enterprise, and both sides shared the conviction that Christianity was closely identified with European civilization and culture, and that the values associated with this civilisation constituted a universal and major condition for the progress of all races and nations. This was in fact written into what may be called the charter of colonialism, the Berlin Act of 1885, which granted the Christian missions an important role.

It is exactly at this point that it is relevant to turn to some of Grundtvig's ideas which question the identification of Christianity with the particular western civilization and in fact implicitly question the concept of Europe behind this civilization. But first we have to include another feature in Europe's relationship with the Third World.

There was an expansionist and missionary motive included in Europe's approach to the non-European world, which was seen in full force in the 19th century. The years from the Berlin Conference in the mid 1880s and up to the end of the First World War became the apogee of European politico-economic and missionary expansion, and it came at a period when Europe was at its peak with regard to self-confidence which again was accompanied by a limited tolerance towards other cultures. This attitude was strengthened in the last decades of the 19th century by the influence of Charles Darwin and his evolutionary scale which resulted in a kind of pseudo-Darwinism according to which civilisations as well as religions were rated, naturally with

the combination of Christianity and European civilisation at the top of the scale.

Both in the colonial and missionary field it meant a European dominance in all areas of life. Most significant was this tendency within the new churches which the missions had founded in Third World countries. Both with regard to leadership and the interpretation of the Gospel very little was left to the local people and the local cultures and traditions. The standards set were for all practical purposes entirely European. The motto written over the arch at the entrance to a mission school in Nigeria was typical for the whole atmosphere in most areas of life: »Make every day a British day!«

It is very interesting also to include the local reactions to this Euro-centred enterprise. It took different forms in the various areas, but for our purpose it is interesting briefly to focus on Nigeria where quite early, even before the turn of the century, strong reactions against the European dominance were expressed in religious terms. People simply broke away from the mission churches and started on their own by founding independent churches where they either combined the Christian gospel and not least the message in the Old Testament with the traditional religion; they so to speak developed an African Christianity. Or they emphasized the local leadership and created their own offices thereby opposing the missionary dominance. This drive for independent churches has ever since been a very strong movement in Nigeria where examples can be seen everywhere. The reactions against European dominance took different forms. It is worth emphasizing that in connection with independent churches which is a widespread phenomenon in Africa, and which did not mean outright rejection of what came from Europe, there was clearly a popular movement behind. It was an expression of the people's own feelings against the alienating systems from abroad, expressed in terms from their own daily life and their own religious tradition. It was not expressed in cultural terms, as an opposition against a foreign culture, and it was not carried by an elite, it was a popular protest.

It was a different situation when at a later stage opposition grew against Europe's political hegemony, and the nationalist movements mounted their campaign for independence. In most

Third World countries nationalism was a political force with a few cultural elements, but it was carried by the educated elite and had only to a limited extent a popular backing. This is important to keep in mind when later we will discuss the difference between ethnic feelings and national feelings and even the cleavage between ethnicity and nationalism, a heterogeneous situation which Grundtvig himself did not experience.

In general we can say that the European self-confidence which prevailed at the time when Europe developed the closest contacts ever seen in history with the non-European world, had a profound impact, and it has been decisive for the relationship between Europe and the Third World ever since. Some kind of correction came when, in the aftermath of the Second World War, colonialism was replaced by nationalism and a number of independent states appeared. A feeling of guilt in view of the tremendous challenges prevailed in some quarters which tended to reduce the European self-confidence and the belief in the universal validity of European values. Some relativism was now added to the old synthesis between civilization and European culture, and there came a greater tolerance and openness towards local experiments carried by other traditions and values.

But over the last few years we have certainly seen a boomerang effect with the European self-confidence and the European standards for civilization and development being back in full force. After all, the political hegemony was replaced by a European economic hegemony, as development assistance after the end of the colonial era moved in as the most important link with the Third World. In spite of all good intentions, aid kept Third World countries at the receiving end and in a dependent position. And when the expectations were not fulfilled and things went wrong during the 1970s and 1980s it was very natural for Europe to assume its old role of directing things and setting the standards.

This reestablishment of old positions has coincided with a most significant development in Europe with the break-up of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Hardly any other event has added so much to the European self-confidence. For decades it had been argued that in the clash between the western, humanistic model and the east-European communist system, the



west-European civilization and culture with its respect for the individual and with its emphasis on freedom, on Human Rights and on democracy and good governance would turn out to be the only value system and the only model for society to prevail on a global scale. The invalidation of the communist ideology and the dissolution of Eastern Europe into nation states have served as a boost and a vindication of the strength of the European civilisation, influenced as it has been by Christian ideals and values. This is the basis for Europe's present position vis-à-vis the Third World where European values again are seen as universally valid. And this is probably the only edition of the much spoken new world order which we have seen so far.

The clearest expression of this attitude is found in the ultimate demands for introduction of democracy and respect for Human Rights. These two demands are now-a-days used as conditionalities for any assistance. This means that the request for universality does not always stop at the principles and ideals as such, the request is often simply to follow the particular European interpretation. This is the case when it is not just a question of democracy, but when the only true edition of democracy is a multi-party system as it is known in the west. The same is the case when the universality of the Human Rights declaration is discussed as being basically a reflection of a European tradition. In both cases the question is whether the European interpretation is the only and absolute one, or whether the two principles which nobody will dismiss as irrelevant, should be placed in a context of local culture and local traditions.

But for the moment we seem to experience what amounts to a crusade for democracy in which connection no distinction seems to be made between what can be claimed to have universal value and what is part of the particular Euro-Christian civilization rooted in the area's peculiar historical experiences. Hence the wheel has come full circle in this brief outline of Europe's relationship with the Third World, and if anything, we see in these years a strengthening of the consciousness of Europe as an entity, both with regard to who can be counted as being inside the fold and in Europe's approach to the outside world.

In spite of being a contemporary to the very early phases of this development we may say that Grundtvig's concept of Europe and the world differed substantially, and for obvious reasons the areas now called the Third World hardly came within his horizon. If we look briefly at the concept of history which he developed in *Handbook on World History* from 1833 the organizing principle which links the major events is that history is concerned with the development of »major peoples« in terms of their attitude to *human life*. Other peoples are only included as far as they are important for such a development. I will only quote one sentence from *Handbook* following Sigurd Aarnes' translation,

World history has nothing to do really with those countries where human life does not visibly stir itself or express itself.

Following this criterion the Anglo-Saxons were outstanding as »the founding fathers of the new Christianity« because they adopted the Gospel in the mother tongue, thereby linking it »to their strange way of thinking and the whole folk character«. This was passed on to the so-called »new world« which according to Grundtvig were the Nordic countries, with their high awareness of human life, and their expression of Christianity through the national character.

It follows that the non-European areas now called the Third World are hardly taken into account. But it is just as important to emphasize that for Grundtvig the dividing line was not between Europe and the rest of the world. A number of European countries did not fulfil the requirement of awareness of the totality of human life, and Europe was not important as such - only the individual peoples. We may further deduce that Grundtvig's concept of Europe differed from the one that prevailed in missionary circles where Europe was seen as the centre of Christianity and civilization. Furthermore, his concept of history raises some questions about missionary activity in general, as Christianity should never be imposed on people in a way which will undermine the national character.

If we move on briefly to touch on Grundtvig's attitude to Christian missionary activity we will further see that he cannot subscribe to the expansionist and missionary dimension which was so closely associated with the whole concept of Europe and its Christian civilization which prevailed, as I have argued earlier, in Grundtvig's own century. The intention is not to go into detail in this somewhat controversial area of Grundtvig's thinking, but just to include it in an assessment of whether elements in Grundtvig's thinking can be useful when transferred to the Third World.

Grundtvig's main point on the issue of missionary activity was that the era of mission had not yet arrived and that the time was not ripe. This statement has always been the crux of the matter for the missiologists and has often lead to total denunciation of Grundtvig. I will not go further into that particular topic, but dwell on the reasons for this statement following his concept of history. In the first place Grundtvig maintained that the people were not prepared to receive the Gospel. In their present state it would be imposed on them and undermine their own traditions and their national character. In the second place, the Bible should not just be sent to non-Christian countries; it would lead to a theology of scripture and prevent them from receiving the »living word«, first and foremost in the mother tongue at Baptism.

Hence the preconditions for any missionary activity was the building up of awareness and belonging in the sense that man exists as part of a community of people, a »folk« community, with its own special history, myths, language and cultural traits. Every man should be conscious of belonging to and existing within a living community in which the living word should be preached and observed for life. - Therefore, before any missionary activity should be contemplated there should be a process of **awakening**. The preparatory, the pedagogical and the educational phase assumes crucial importance. It is in this context that »education for life« comes in as the most important means: to make people aware of what it means to be a human being at a special point in history, with their own identity as expressed in myths, language and cultural traditions, and with the

ability to use their resources and take their destiny in their own hands.

The risk connected with such an approach is a double one: first that education becomes a goal in itself, not the means to achieve something which was Grundtvig's intention; secondly that »education for life« stops with »folkelighed«, with the awareness of being part of a living community in its own historical context, and never arrives at bringing »the living word«, the Gospel, into the picture which was Grundtvig's intention. Both these issues have turned out to be relevant when we later look at what parts of Grundtvig's thinking and ideas have been most influential in an international context.

When we compare Grundtvig's approach with the generally held ideas about the relationship between Europe and the non-European world which I examined earlier, Grundtvig's suggestions turn out to be quite different and for their time even quite radical. First of all he distinguishes clearly between Christianity and European civilization, and he goes even as far as divorcing their centuries old marriage. This again is connected with his positive assessment of other peoples and cultures. He is far from employing any scale on which he can rate the various cultures and religions. Differing from most of his contemporaries Grundtvig took a basically positive and optimistic view of other cultures and communities. For him it was essential to start with the community as it was and look at its inherent potentials expressed in the »Folk spirit«. He did not assume that there was any incommensurability or contradiction between Folkelighed and Christianity.

And this leads to the third and crucial point. From Grundtvig's ideas on mission we can learn that an essential point for him was to avoid *alienation*. People should not be alienated from their own community, their historical roots and their national and cultural belonging, but on the contrary be made aware and made conscious of their identity and their potentials within their own setting and their own way of life. By using the concept of alienation as characteristic for Grundtvig's approach to other peoples and cultures we have also indicated that in this respect he was far ahead of his time. K.E. Bugge has rightly emphasized that »Grundtvig's thinking is far removed from imperialistic

tendencies«. Or to use another contemporary expression, cultural imperialism is not included in Grundtvig's approach to other cultures, not even when Christianity is involved. Grundtvig's concern was with what it means to be man at a given time and place and to grow in that awareness - irrespective, we may add, of man living inside or outside Europe.

It is this message which can be read out of Grundtvig's writings on mission that have appealed to a number of people who are concerned with the fate of the Third World and its inferior position in relation to Europe. Even more appealing have been the measures which he has suggested to rectify the malaise and ameliorate the deplorable state of affairs. This becomes quite clear as we now introduce a few cases - and there are not that many because Grundtvig has been up against both the language barrier and his firm rooting of the ideas in his own historical, cultural and national context. This again raises an issue for further consideration whether another limiting factor could have been that Grundtvig's conceptual framework and suggestions may not be applicable in a context which is quite different from the one Grundtvig was familiar with.

One first case is naturally *Dr. Ozumba* and his Grundtvig Institute, as we have here one of the few Third World representatives who has actually studied Grundtvig and has become familiar with his ideas and not least the paradoxes inherent in the transfer of Grundtvig's ideas to the Third World in general and Africa in particular. It is characteristic that Ozumba takes his point of departure in Grundtvig's idea of alienation and uses it to interpret the situation in his own country. Just as Grundtvig fought »the Latin school« and the alienating Roman yoke, Ozumba has designated what he calls »the school for death« as the enemy. The school for death was forced upon Nigeria and Africa as a whole as part of colonialism with all its alienating influences, and it was carried by the elite over and above the head of the man in the village. Naturally he turns to Grundtvig's idea of »education for life« as we have heard. The school for life must replace the school for death and must be aiming at awakening the popular dynamics and the people's own potentials by introducing what is called the awareness curriculum based on

the living word and drawing on material from history, folklore and traditional arts.

We can see how Ozumba applies Grundtvig's framework to explain and interpret the Third World's situation in the aftermath of colonialism, and how he follows Grundtvig's means of alleviation by introducing the education for life concept. A little later we will discuss the problem to what extent the education for life concept can work in a post-colonial, Third-World situation. But it is important to emphasize that Ozumba does not ascribe the same absoluteness to Grundtvig's thinking and ideas as my South Korean friend did. On the contrary, he is fully aware that there has to be a translation process. »While Grundtvigian ideals can provide answers to most of our problems of development« Ozumba emphasizes that carbon copying will not work. It becomes a question of »exploring the potentials of Grundtvigian ideals« in the local community and keep ways and means flexible.

This is quite clearly a relative approach to Grundtvig's ideals and prescriptions, and by implication we may add that it takes account of the fact that the Nigerian and the African situation is a different historical situation from the one Grundtvig faced in the Danish society in his time. And implicitly we may further deduce that colonialism which most Third World countries have experienced meant a foreign hegemony and an alienating influence which penetrated and transformed the whole fabric of society to an extent which the Roman yoke could not manage in the Danish situation. This raises the question how applicable and of how much explanatory value Grundtvig's concepts will be in the longer term perspective; in other words, how adequate his categories will be. Ozumba has himself hinted at this question when he in one place ends up by asking whether a Nigerian *Folkelighed* is at all possible under the prevailing circumstances.

We get a much more affirmative answer when we turn to the so far most elaborate attempt to employ Grundtvig's universe and whole analytical framework in defining the Third World's situation vis-à-vis the penetrating influence from Europe. The leading French researcher on Grundtvig, *Erica Simon* (who died in March 1993), establishes a close parallel between the Danish situation in the 19th century and the Third World in the post-

colonial situation, and she argues strongly in favour of transplanting the Danish or Scandinavian model to the Third World in general and Africa in particular. Like in Denmark earlier on, there is in Africa a high degree of alienation because of the foreign culture imposed from above by the elite. By drawing on the Danish experiences and Grundtvig's idea of a truly human culture »embodied in the life of the entire people« (Simon p.18) it is possible to reverse the process. Protest should come from below, from the people (like we saw it in connection with the independent churches) revolting against a borrowed culture, and instead they should turn to their own culture created by themselves and to their own oral tradition or what is called »the culture of non-literate people« (p. 19) which emphasizes the importance of belonging to the community at the expense of the individual. The important instrument in this process is the Folk High School which can generate »this culture based on national foundations and with its roots deep in the people, and from that very fact it has on its side both life and future« (p. 23). In fact, the Folk High School has become »the authentic expression of *humanism*, as conceived by Grundtvig, namely: *national* in its origin, *popular* in scope and *universal* in its *finality*« (p. 23).

Erica Simon found the same philosophy and even some attempts to work along these lines in the French-African movement *Négritude* members of which were a number of French speaking African intellectuals, often living in Paris in the 1940s and 50s. They aimed at »a dynamic restoration of an authentic African culture appropriate to the present« (p. 8). They looked for ways to restore the cultural initiative of the people, and they wanted to **change** the relations between the people and the elite. For Erica Simon the unique Danish or Scandinavian model based on Grundtvig's visions and ideas represented a ready-made **guidance** to follow. The true humanism found in the Grundtvigian tradition was of universal value and should similarly be developed in the African context.

For Erica Simon there is no doubt that the Grundtvigian universe (to use that term) ought to be transplanted to a Third World area like Africa, and that it will work in the African context. Yet, it has to be questioned whether such an absolute

approach to the transfer of Grundtvigian ideals and the direct linkage established between 19th century Denmark and 20th century post-colonial Africa are at all tenable. I will mention three issues for further consideration.

First, it appears as a weakness that, like in the case of nationalism and the struggle for independence mentioned earlier, the Negritude movement was in spite of all good intentions very much an elite phenomenon. We are in fact close to a situation where the people's own culture was imposed from above and virtually generated from above by the »awakened« elite. But according to Vilhelm Nielsen that was also a dilemma in the earlier Danish situation.

Secondly, and from a historian's position, we must ask whether Grundtvig and the Grundtvigian ideals were at all transferable in the absolute sense we have met it here. Was Grundtvig not a product of a particular Danish situation and rooted in his special epoch? His basic concept was the nation as the undisputed and homogeneous unit on the basis of which he could appeal to a given cultural tradition and could expect the emergence of a coherent popular response. He had a stable and well defined basis from where he could operate. What happens when this is no longer the case? When the existence and function of the nation can no longer be taken for granted?

This leads to a third issue. It should be contemplated whether the colonial and post-colonial situation is not a *sui generis* situation which has no real parallels in earlier Danish history. A number of basic concepts are questioned. It is not just a problem of an imposed, foreign culture which undermines or denounces the national, popular culture. In the post-colonial situation we are faced with more or less imposed nations, artificially created, where people's primary loyalty is hardly to the nation, but to smaller units like ethnic groups and religious communities. There are hardly any universally accepted institutions like the church which can integrate the newly created nation; there is no common historical experience which can justify the present state of affairs; and often there is no common language which can carry and unify the different cultural traditions. It is a situation of diversification which Grundtvig never had to face and could not take into account. Hence it has to be



asked how and to what extent Grundtvigian ideals can work when transferred to conditions which run contrary to Grundtvig's own preconditions. In other words, the disruptive influence of colonialism goes far beyond the problem of an imposed, alienating culture, and questions the whole basis of operation.

Erica Simon's advocacy for the universality of Grundtvig's message and for the relevance of the particular Danish experiences in a Third World situation is very useful, not least because it raises some pertinent questions about the use of Grundtvig and Grundtvigian ideals in meeting the demands for change in Third World countries. It is of course easier to raise the sceptical questions than to produce the appropriate answers. One way of moving ahead will be to include some of the experiences gained over the last 30 years by practising some of Grundtvig's ideas in Third World countries, not least the Folk High School. I have recently, for a related purpose, had the chance to assess most of these projects, and I will here present some of the main observations.

At the outset it is interesting to point out that the initiatives to transfer the Folk High School idea were originally based on the same assumptions as those of Erica Simon. The situation in the Third World was considered to be very much like 19th century Denmark, and for that reason it was essential to transfer the experience of »development« (to use that phrase) in 19th century Denmark to the »developing« world. The Danish society had thrown off a foreign yoke, and following that newly won awareness there had been a political liberation of the oppressed groups while at the same time ideals of democracy were realized, and a high degree of social equality reached. The major force behind this process of change was thought to be Grundtvig's ideas as manifested first and foremost in the Folk High School movement. These schools would in Third World countries become »counter-cultural« schools, and they would generate a development on the Danish or Scandinavian model. The method was to be the indirect one: the development of agriculture and other occupational sectors through the improvement of historical and cultural awareness.

One first observation is that it has been difficult to strike a balance between the school for life which was the main purpose,

and general adult education with training in practical skills. Dr. Ozumba admits that he has had to compromise on Grundtvig's principle of having no examinations, and he tries to balance it with other measures like the Grundtvig hour. It is also clear that in many places the emphasis has moved from consciousness raising, the crucial factor in education for life, to training in skills needed in society. Various factors are behind this major shift in purpose and emphasis. One factor is that Folk High Schools in Third World countries mainly cater for drop-outs, school leavers, suppressed groups like women. When the recruitment is done from such groups the demand for some officially recognized skills will naturally be high.

But the deviation from the original idea should probably be seen in a larger perspective. The Folk High School idea is transferred to societies where development is the main and almost the only item on the agenda, not a national awakening. Nor is it primarily a question of freedom from a foreign imposed culture, but rather freedom from corruption and freedom from state intervention and government misuse of power. People's primary concern is the struggle to achieve better opportunities for the individual or possibly for the core family, but to a lesser degree for the whole community to which the individuals belong. Under these circumstances it is hardly realistic to imagine that the Folk High School idea will not be closely linked with the concept of development and thus geared to the current ideas of societal change which in turn means a strong emphasis on the acquirement of vocational skills and training. We may say that the Folk High School idea will easily turn into general adult education with which it was originally supposed to have nothing in common, at the expense of the so-called »awareness curriculum«.

Yet, the deviation from the original idea may not be as great as it seems if we consider how the Folk High School idea has worked in the Danish context. After all, in their earliest period, the Folk High Schools were closely geared to the agrarian society of the day and contributed, though indirectly, to the development of this particular pattern of society by motivating people and making them aware of their own potentials. The movement was not very old, before it experienced its own

divisions as some schools either turned into or were started as primarily agricultural colleges. They certainly felt rooted in the original tradition and kept it alive, but inevitably they had to give priority to vocational training and specialized education in order to meet the needs in the predominantly agricultural society. Also the recent discussion of the revision of the law guiding the Folk High Schools is relevant as it has been suggested to strengthen the rule guiding the ratio in the curriculum between general awareness-raising topics and specialized education in various skills.

The second observation from the review of earlier initiatives has to do with the difficulty in coming to grips with what constitutes the unit upon which a common identity and a common sense of history should be based. We hear only little about the nation as a separate cultural entity with its history and myths or about the use of a common language. On the contrary, the visible unit can hardly be the nation. In the case dealing with a Folk High School-like institution in Ghana much emphasis is put on the students' self-awareness generated by a strong emphasis on language, history and culture and by including local customs like storytelling, singing and dancing. There is in this case hardly any reference to what constitutes Folk and Folkelighed. But the fellowship has been established on a purely tribal or ethnic basis which tends to cut off the wider unit, the nation state Ghana, and emphasize its heterogeneous character. It is fully acknowledged that problems arise in relation to the history of Ghana and not least in relation to English which is the national language. But the limited local focus is so valuable in terms of the overall intention that even though it runs counter to the concept of nation, it has to take priority.

We are here faced with a fundamental dilemma in Africa, the cleavage between the nation and the ethnic groups. When we talk about rediscovery of self and community, what kind of self and community are we referring to? Closest is the indigenous tradition found in the local context, but there is also the self and the community from the recent past »bastardized« as it is by colonialism and the so-called western civilization. From which of the available, but contradictory traditions should we develop our identity and our historical roots? Things are further complicated

by first the religious pluralism which means that religion can hardly be a strong factor in strengthening common identity and fellowship, and secondly and even more pertinent, the language situation with English as the medium of instruction, but not the mother tongue. Can a foreign language be the carrier of a common system of values? Or is it possible to generate Folkelighed in a language which is foreign to the people involved?

As quoted earlier Dr. Ozumba tends to answer in the negative as he is inclined to say that a Nigerian Folkelighed is hardly possible under these circumstances. This is probably the only conclusion to arrive at because at reflection the basic reality already touched upon is that in most Third World countries we cannot speak of nations as homogeneous units carried by joint historical experiences and nourished by feelings of nationalism, but about political units more or less imposed from outside and consisting of disparate groups constituted according to ethnic and religious criteria.

The conclusion is that the usual vehicles or instruments for realizing Grundtvig's ideals cannot be used straight away in a Third World situation. It appears from most cases that in practice the nation is no longer the unit towards which the work of the Folk High Schools is geared. They appear to have settled for the ethnic or tribal basis and to relate the awareness curriculum to the traditions found at that level. But it has left them in a painful dilemma, and the hope is still one day to give the national dimension its proper place in the consciousness-raising activity of the Folk High Schools.

The question to ask here is whether the time has come to face the realities of this dilemma more directly and reach a higher level of clarification with regard to the transfer of Grundtvig's ideals and the Folk High School idea to a Third World situation. In recent years we have almost everywhere and not only in the Third World seen an upsurge of ethnic feelings which has made it difficult to use our usual terminology. Especially the distinction between nations and minorities has become difficult. What is one day considered to be an ethnically defined minority, has the next day been accepted as a nation in its own right. And all the feelings and expressions of a common identity which we normally associate with a nation are now

reserved for the ethnic minorities, and their so to speak »national rights« have to a large extent been legitimized; national movements have almost become identical with ethnic movements.

At the same time the concept of the nation state which goes back to the 19th century is also in a process of change. It may not be as extreme as the former Yugoslavia where there was said to be six mini-states, five ethnic groups, four languages, three religions and two alphabets. But especially in the Third World we have to reckon with nations that within their boundaries include a number of dichotomies which we did not usually associate with a nation: no identity between mother tongues and national language, no identity between religion and the nation and so on. Such situations give rise to questions which are almost unanswerable: when is a nation not a nation? And when is a minority a nation?

But they also lead us back to the point made earlier that essential elements in Grundtvig's ideals and in the Folk High School idea like the necessary relationship between history, language and nation are so rooted in a Danish context and presuppose a small nation with a common language, a joint historical tradition and a homogeneous culture that they cannot just be transferred to other areas, least of all to situations of great diversity which in many ways contradict these basic ideas.

Faced with such realities, while still convinced of the relevance of Grundtvig's ideas for many Third World countries, we could point to two ways ahead. The first one should simply be to reduce the dependency on Grundtvig's own very familiar categories of nation, language, mythology etc. The main criterion in judging the various activities has so far been how far they have functioned according to the original Folk High School idea and the basic principles first outlined by Grundtvig himself. After all the basic message from Grundtvig as it is presented in the Folk High School idea does not stand or fall with his special vocabulary or with the special means he from his experiences valued and suggested.

This leads to the second suggestion. Without losing the essence of Grundtvig's message and visions the attempt should be made to adjust Grundtvig's basic ideals and reformulate the

original idea to face the prevailing circumstances and new challenges in the Third World. Instead of talking of a national awakening, emphasis could be shifted towards a democratic awakening. Without dismissing the value of the identity rooted in culture and history the awareness of the idea of democracy could be just as important, not democracy as a system of government known in Europe, but as a way of living, as the principle guiding the relations between people, a principle that emphasizes responsibility and accountability in personal relations and also in the relationship between the ones who rule and the ones who are ruled. Such guidelines for people's attitudes and mutual relations, this kind of ethics representing a universal humanism, to use an expression from Erica Simon, could well be the objective of the so-called awareness-rising education or for the awareness curriculum associated with the Folk High School. And I could venture the hypothesis that the concept of democracy as it has just been developed is in good harmony with the essence of Grundtvig's original message and objective.

At last we have come to the end of our long journey where we started off by discussing the changes in the concept of Europe and the corresponding changes in the relationship between Europe and the Third World. At this point on the road we made a stop in order to examine whether Grundtvig's categories and whole conceptual framework could guide us in interpreting and understanding this changing relationship. When we had established Grundtvig's relevance in that connection we were ready to move on only to discover that we had arrived at a round-about with several exits. One would take us on a well-trodden road where both Danes and local people have travelled over the years carrying with them suitcases with Folk High School ideas and rucksacks with fertilizer and water. At various places along the road the Folk High School idea had started to grow in varying sizes and also produced some fruits, most of them for local consumption and only a few for the benefit of the whole nation. There was also another option, a more hilly road not yet finished which means that the traveller himself must rewrite the signposts and even invent names for the new direction. This new road looks promising, but as it has not yet been completed it may take some time to finish the journey.

**References:**

- Sigurd Aage Aarnes: »Grundtvig the Historian«, in Christian Thodberg & A. Pontoppidan Thyssen (eds.): **N.F.S. Grundtvig. Tradition and Renewal**, Copenhagen 1983.
- K.E. Bugge: »Grundtvig and India«, **Bangalore Theological Forum**, 17, 2, 1985.
- Holger Bernt Hansen: »Mission og u-landshjælp«, in Steffen Johannessen & Torben Krogh (eds.): **Livsoplysning. Festskrift til K.E. Bugge**, Frederikshavn 1988.
- Holger Bernt Hansen: »Grundtvig and the Third World. The Transfer of Grundtvig's Ideas to Other Peoples and Cultures«, in A.M. Allchin & J.H. Schjørring (eds.): **Heritage and Prophecy**, forthcoming.
- Torben Lundbæk (ed.): **African Humanism - Scandinavian Culture: a dialogue**, Copenhagen 1970.
- Vilhelm Nielsen: »Den tredje Verden og Grundtvig«, in Jørgen I. Jensen & Erik A. Nielsen (eds.): **Efterklange - et Grundtvig Seminar**, Copenhagen 1983.
- Kachi Ozumba: articles and papers reproduced in the report »**Education for Life**«. **Proposal for a Cooperation between the Grundtvig Institute Movement, Nigeria, and the Danish Folk High School Association, Denmark**, publ. by the Danish Folk High School Association, Copenhagen 1990.
- Erica Simon: »-og solen står med bonden op-«. **De nordiske folkehøjskolars idehistorie**, Vojens 1989.